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*Testimony before the Public Health Committee*

***In Support of SB 1088: AN ACT CONCERNING SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY***

*Submitted By: Barry M. Simon, President & CEO Oak Hill*

*March 18, 2015*

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter and the members of the Public Health Committee, my name is Barry Simon and I am the President Oak Hill. I have been in the field for over 25 years. Oak Hill has been providing services for 120 years, and is a leader in providing the highest quality community-based programs; through education, assistive technology, programs and advocacy, we support people at every stage of life. Oak Hill, has 11 distinct programs; 113 program sites, classrooms, and homes located in 60 towns. Oak Hill employs over 1,400 professionals to successfully meet the varied and changing needs of close to 40,000 people with disabilities each year. As you might imagine, we have done quite a bit of changing over the 120 years but, what is obvious to me as I visit the various programs and meet with participants and staff, is that Oak Hill, like so many other community providers, is committed to the people we serve and our mission to set the standard in providing education and lifelong learning opportunities to enhance independence and quality of life for people with disabilities. Yet, as Connecticut's largest POS provider of services for the disabled, it is very difficult to do business and even more difficult to pay a living wage with 10 years of no net increases and decreases in our rates.

I am here today on behalf of those we serve, my incredible staff (part of which are 1199 union staff) and hundreds of thousands of individuals served by the community provider system. I am not here to pit one part of the system against another, I am here to ask you to do the right thing at the right time; the people we serve matter, and the people we employ matter!

I would like to share my support for SB 1088 also requires that by December 2015, The Commissioner of DDS submit a plan to address the needs of ALL persons receiving services from The Department of Developmental Services. Thank you for raising this bill and thank the 67 legislators of the I/DD Caucus for having the courage to put forth an agenda that values the rights and the dignity of people with I/DD and to takes concrete steps towards developing a long term plan to create a more fair, just and sustainable system for the future. The true fix is with a long term solution for funding any services. Programs have closed in the last few years and will continue to do so – this is not a false alarm. As an agency we have closed programs, made reductions in others, reduced staff, and reduced benefits due to the short sighted approach to state budgeting. As we work on plans for the future of our agency and providing services that meet the needs of those we serve, developing business strategies to succeed in this environment is next to impossible and, this will ultimately lead to dire consequences for the total community service system.

***Our Mission: Oak Hill sets the standard, partnering with people with disabilities, to provide services and solutions promoting independence, education, health and dignity.***



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We recognize and appreciate that the Legislature wants to invest the limited dollars wisely. In order to get the best return on your investment, funds need to be appropriated to address the comprehensive needs of the system and consumers. Given adequate resources that truly fund our costs of services, we have the capacity and willingness to expand services in the private sector; which saves the State money and brings in federal matching funds. However, it is hard to provide care, take on more individuals, and innovate while the system is being cut.

This bill represents an opportunity to improve the quality of life and economic activity in our communities for your constituents. SB 1088 includes protection for those currently living in institutions and a plan for transition to appropriate community-based settings and a plan to address the unmet needs of people who receive DDS services.

Thank you to Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter and the members of The Public Health Committee for raising this important bill. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions, or for additional information.

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